

Sharp Pens Sharpen Swords

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.
Chinese Proverb

Most modern writers prefer word processors to pens, 21st century swords are mainly ceremonial, and Edison's incandescent bulbs long ago replaced candles, but the title of this article and the foregoing quotation remain figuratively correct, because intellectual pathfinders who shed light on politico-military problems then suggest solutions perform invaluable services. The message to readers of this missive is, "It's never too early or too late to make your mark." Fifteen publications selected for discussion from nearly 100 outlets offer aspiring authors a much richer menu of options that their predecessors enjoyed.

Typical Trailblazer

The *Infantry Journal*, activated in 1904, was a typical trailblazer. Charter members who gave that brainchild an auspicious start included two famous flag officers and two precocious second lieutenants. Major General Arthur MacArthur, Doug's daddy, wore a Medal of Honor; Major General Tasker Bliss culminated his career as Army Chief of Staff, 1917-18. Second Lieutenant George Catlett Marshall, who became Army Chief of Staff shortly before World War II and retired with five stars, later served as Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State while four-star Walter Krueger, commissioned from the ranks, commanded Sixth U.S. Army during all of its campaigns in the Southwest Pacific.

A 679-page anthology called the *Infantry Journal Reader*, published in 1943, reprinted 178 hand-picked articles. The list of authors included many names that were little known in the early 1930s but now are illustrious, such as Panzer leader Heinz Guderian, "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell who headed the China-Burma-India theater during World War II, Flying Tigers leader Claire Chennault, Ole Blood and Guts George Patton, William Lee (the "father of U.S. airborne forces"), and British Captain B.H. Liddell Hart, an oft-quoted strategist. Harold Lamb, who later wrote 14 highly respected military histories, and Robert Strausz-Hupé, who founded the Foreign Policy Research Institute, represent standout civilians. Forty other contributors may have become famous, but nobody ever will know, because they hid behind ludicrous pseudonyms like Whitenred, Blackanblue, Stonecold, Tentage, Tenderhide, Trenchcoat, Chevron, Hungry, and Heelclicker, despite assurances that "the politics of an author makes no difference. Democrats, Republicans; New Deal, Old Deal; Right, Left, middle; so long as he has something to say about fighting war that makes sense, his article is printed."

Current Torchbearers

The 15 contemporary U.S. torchbearers selected for comparison vary considerably with regard to frequency of publication, clientele, and contents. Monthly magazines, for example, are better suited for hot topics than quarterlies. Outlets that reach mainly parochial audiences contrast sharply with cosmopolitan competitors, while those that cast the widest nets potentially influence the most readers. Not all, for example, reach officials in DoD, the State Department, national security agencies, academia, think-tanks, research institutes, business, the news media, U.S. service schools, selected libraries; allied embassies, and military establishments abroad. The number of hard copy subscribers is less important than in the fairly recent past, because most online editions are free.

Publication	Publisher	Frequency	Principal Audience	Principal Focus	Word Limitations
Mainly Military					
JFQ ¹	NDU Press ⁵	Quarterly	Joint	Joint Warfare	3,000-5,000
Army	Army Assn	Monthly	Army	Land Warfare	1,000-1,500
Parameters	Army War College	Quarterly	Army	Land Warfare	4,500-5,000
Military Review	Army Staff College	Bimonthly	Army	Land Warfare	3,000-5,000
Proceedings	Naval Institute	Monthly	Sea Services	Naval Warfare	2,000-3,000
Sea Power	Navy League	Monthly	Sea Services	Naval Warfare	Up to 1,200
NWCR ²	Naval War College	Quarterly	Sea Services	Naval Warfare	5,000-9,000
Air & Space Power	USAF ⁶	Quarterly	Air Force	Air, Space Warfare	Up to 5,000
MC Gazette ³	Marine Corps Assn	Monthly	Marine Corps	Expeditionary Ops	2,000-3,000
Special Warfare	JFKSWCS ⁷	Quarterly	Special Ops	Special Operations	1,000-2,500
Armed Forces Jnl ⁴	Independent	Monthly	DoD	National Defense	1,000-2,000
Politico-Military					
Foreign Affairs	COFR ⁸	Bimonthly	State, DoD	National Security	4,000-5,000
Foreign Policy	CIIP ⁹	Quarterly	State, DoD	National Security	2,500-3,500
Orbis	FPRI ¹⁰	Quarterly	State, DoD	National Security	Up to 7,500
Wash Quarterly	CSIS ¹¹	Quarterly	State, DoD	National Security	4,000-5,000

¹ Joint Force Quarterly

² Naval War College Review

³ Marine Corps Gazette

⁴ Armed Forces Journal

⁵ National Defense University Press

⁶ United States Air Force

⁷ JFK Special Warfare Center and School

⁸ Council on Foreign Relations

⁹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

¹⁰ Foreign Policy Research Institute

¹¹ Center for Strategic and International Studies

Joint Force Quarterly

National Defense University Press publishes *Joint Force Quarterly* for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *JFQ* features joint and combined education, training, and operations, plus national security policies and strategies, for use by top-flight DoD, interagency, and allied decision-makers and their staffs. Other beneficiaries include politico-military planners and programmers at lower levels. *JFQ*'s editor recently snapped up articles about international-interagency processes, multinational interoperability, transformation, and joint logistics.

Army Magazine

Army magazine, a monthly product of the Association of the United States Army, covers a spectrum of tactical, operational, strategic, and logistical landpower issues, with particular attention to U.S. Army activities and interests worldwide. Prominent displays in recent months included the new modular Army, future combat systems, disaster relief, active/reserve culture gaps, and Army recruiting crises. Presentations commonly include a block of articles that attack particular topics from different angles.

Parameters

Parameters, devoted to strategically significant national defense issues, emanates from the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks. It emphasizes the art and science of land warfare, joint and combined matters, military strategy, military leadership and management, military history, ethics, and other topics of current interest to the US Army, the Department of Defense, and students of such subjects everywhere. Recent commentaries included Afghanistan after four years, the treatment of illegal combatants, intelligence reform, and controversies concerning the news media.

Military Review

Military Review, ensconced at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas as a subsidiary of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, is a forum for original thought on the art and science of land warfare at tactical and operational levels. Readers in more than 100 countries receive bimonthly issues in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic. Samplings during 2005 disclosed bits about brigade combat teams, Iraqi security forces, improvised explosive devises, and cultural knowledge needs.

Proceedings

Proceedings magazine has been the U.S. Naval Institute's flagship publication since 1874. Its editor increasingly solicits articles that highlight the Army and Air Force, but still concentrates on issues that primarily affect the

Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and U.S.-flagged Merchant Marine. Each monthly issue addresses current issues and historical perspectives from strategic, operational, and tactical angles. The following four items are illustrative: Coast Guard homeland security roles, high-speed sealift, naval special operations, and naval education.

Sea Power

The Navy League circulates *Sea Power* magazine each month to educate sea services, the American people, their elected representatives, and industry regarding the need for robust naval and maritime forces. Contents not only document key developments in major ship, naval aircraft, weapons, and doctrinal programs but track naval policy and political developments. Short-range missile threats, the new Iraqi Navy, naval counterterrorism capabilities, and sea basing attracted recent attention.

Naval War College Review

The *Naval War College Review* discusses public policy matters of interest to maritime services. Articles therein satisfy two essential criteria: 1) They support academic and professional activities of the Naval War College; and 2) They appeal to a wide readership. Topics range from strategy and operations through international law, defense economics, and regional security studies to civil-military relations, war gaming, and military ethics, with particular attention to influences on maritime security.

Marine Corps Gazette

Marine Corps Association's cornerstone publication is the monthly *Marine Corps Gazette*, which it issues to keep readers well informed concerning the Corps' history, policies, current operations, plans, and programs. Esprit is a perennial topic. Themes in a recent issue included individual and small unit discipline, protecting infrastructure, measuring success in counterinsurgency, information management from the bottom, ANGLICOs (air/naval gunfire liaison companies), and recommended readings.

Air & Space Power Journal

Air & Space Power Journal is an official publication of the United States Air Force, but opinions expressed therein need not reflect prevailing policies. On the contrary, its editor seeks innovative ideas about aerospace doctrine, strategy, tactics, force structure, readiness, and other matters of national defense. Assorted selections during 2005 reviewed Red Flag training exercises, aerial search and rescue operations, air base defense, and esoteric counterspace initiatives.

Special Warfare

Special Warfare magazine, under auspices of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, promotes the professional development of special operations forces (SOF) by critiquing established doctrine and advancing new ideas for consideration throughout the Army special operations community. All aspects of Special Forces, Rangers, civil affairs, psychological operations, and the Army's special ops aviation regiment are subject to scrutiny. Articles that publicize unclassified aspects of SOF activities in hot spots overseas are particularly popular.

Armed Forces Journal

Armed Forces Journal, a joint service monthly magazine that targets audiences throughout the U.S. military community, has reviewed and analyzed key defense issues for over 140 years. *AFJ* offers in-depth coverage of military technology, procurement, logistics, doctrine, strategy, and tactics. It also provides special coverage of special operations, U.S. Coast Guard, and U.S. National Guard developments. Representative articles recently proceeded up the scale from smart artillery to "big ticket" budget programs, occupation problems in Iraq, and space war games.

Foreign Affairs

The Council on Foreign Relations, which concentrates on U.S. foreign policy and international affairs, includes nearly all past and present Presidents, Secretaries of State, Defense, Treasury, other senior U.S. government officials, renowned scholars, and major leaders of business, media, human rights, and other non-governmental groups. The Council publishes *Foreign Affairs*, a quarterly forum for new ideas, analyses, and debate. Foreign policy polls, pandemics, regime changes, and how to win the war in Iraq have graced its pages during the last year.

Foreign Policy

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace publishes *Foreign Policy*, a quarterly that offers informative, insightful, and lively discourse on the full range of topics related to American foreign policy and national security, as well as in-depth analyses of important international developments. UN control of the Internet, a profile of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, nuclear proliferation, and energy interdependence are illustrative subjects.

Orbis

The Foreign Policy Research Institute in 1957 founded *Orbis*, a quarterly journal of world affairs, which provides an outlet for policy-makers, scholars, and

private citizens who seek informative, insightful, and lively discourse regarding the full range of U.S. foreign policy and national security topics, as well as in-depth analysis of other important international developments. CIA's culture, the impact of immigration on national security, U.S. abilities to transplant democracy, and U.S. relationships with the European Union are representative subjects.

The Washington Quarterly

The Center for Strategic and International Studies issues *The Washington Quarterly*, a journal of international affairs that analyzes global strategic changes and their public policy implications for subscribers in more than 50 countries. Typical topics include the U.S. role in the world, emerging great powers, missile defenses, counterterrorism, regional flashpoints, and the implications of global political change. Contributors reflect diverse political, regional, and professional perspectives.

Writing Tips – Principles of Outstanding Professional Writing

Every professional publication prefers its own writing style, but authors who honor the following tips generally produce the most attractive drafts for consideration anywhere:

TITLE

Pick a title that is descriptive and short. That first step is imperative, because it essentially determines what the document is all about.

MISSION

Tack the writing mission on the wall and keep it constantly in sight. Disregard all tangential topics, no matter interesting or important they may be.

OUTLINES

Prepare outlines even for short papers, so all relevant subjects are displayed in a logical sequence. Start with a skeleton outline, then add subtopics and outline each of them. Revise as you progress (outlines are a lot like contingency plans, which seldom are implemented the way their architects originally conceived).

BASIC SUBDIVISIONS

Professional books, magazine articles, substantial reports, and other official papers most often should comprise three parts, even if informally:

BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND SCOPE

- Background information up front briefly explains why the subject is important.
- One or more sharply defined purposes identify central objectives.
- The scope tells readers what topics to expect and what not to expect.

MAIN BODY

- The main body, which discusses all pertinent points, establishes a solid foundation.

WRAP-UP

- Conclusions, culminating comments, recapitulation or whatever you care to call it leave readers with the ultimate message. The wrap-up never should address topics not previously discussed.

RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

- Peruse a broad spectrum of opinion with an open mind. Never reach conclusions first, then prepare a paper to support them. You will often find that initial impressions were poorly founded and fallacious.
- Take nothing for granted. Challenge conventional wisdom to see if it is sound, regardless of the source.
- Document important ideas with footnotes, so readers can pursue selected topics in greater depth, if they so desire.

WRITING TECHNIQUES

- An introductory quotation that precedes paragraph 1 on page 1 of a relatively short document or opens chapters of a longer one can establish themes, particularly if tied directly to the text.
- The lead sentence and paragraph should capture reader interest immediately. You may not get a second chance.
- Understatement is preferable to hyperbole. Never use a sledge hammer to drive a thumbtack.

- Precious ideas get lost if presentations are boring, so use a thesaurus to avoid undesirable repetition and quotation books to add spice.
- Acknowledge opposing views and critique them. That way you answer questions before skeptics ask them.
- Use common terms, so all readers can proceed without constant reference to a dictionary. Avoid unnecessary use of foreign words. Employ acronyms sparingly.
- Mix simple with complex sentences that are neither staccato nor excessively long, so the document reads smoothly.
- Keep it simple, so all readers can understand complex subjects (when my son was six years old he had a book that basically explained Einstein's Theory of Relativity).
- Be clear and concise, but never sacrifice clarity for brevity. Never use 10 words when one or two say the same thing equally well or better.
- Be precise. Pick every word carefully.
- Emphasize active voice. Open each sentence with a primary thought, then follow with appropriate modifiers (although, however, but, yet) as required.
- Never open sentences with a conjunction (and, but).
- Use a thesaurus to avoid undesirable repetition and quotation books to help add spice (your best ideas will get lost if presentations are boring).
- Use topic headings as "road signs," so the writer as well as readers know where they have been, where they are, where they are headed at all times.

REVIEW TECHNIQUES

- Few writers produce perfect first drafts, so rewrite each paragraph until it is the best you can produce.
- Be your own sharpest critic. Read out loud what you wrote to see how it sounds.
- Solicit comments from knowledgeable peer reviewers. Pay attention if they disagree or don't understand, particularly if more than one find

similar faults. Otherwise, you unnecessarily risk public embarrassment after the document is published.

- Proof carefully.

CULMINATING COMMENTS

Consider the bullets above to be starting points. Add, subtract, and otherwise revise as you see fit until you possess writing tips that suit your particular style, then use them as a checklist to improve future products.

Hop to it. Geriatric John Collins, half way through his 8th decade, will be on the sidelines cheering.

Colonel John M. Collins (USA, Ret) has contributed articles to 13 of the 15 publications selected for discussion above. He currently steers the “Warlord Loop,” an email net whose 150 heavy hitters ventilate crucial national security issues from every quadrant of the compass.